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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND NOTE-BOOK WORK IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Perhaps no problem of school life causes the conscientious teacher more worry and thought than that of providing for the individual needs of the members of a class. Torn between the conflicting desires, on the one hand of lifting and guiding the weakling from his slough of despond to the firm ground of successful accomplishment, and on the other of providing new material for the ablest pupil and encouraging him to effort commensurate with his ability, one most frequently finds oneself educating the extremes of a group of children to be either weak learners or indolent dawdlers, while the mediocre, the average of the class, plod along without incentive to extra exertion and become confirmed in their mediocrity. We¹ believe the following pages may suggest to teachers some means for overcoming this difficulty and providing at least partially for the individual differences of their pupils in modern foreign languages. It will readily be seen, moreover, that these suggestions are quite capable of adaptation to other lines of work, especially mathematics.

Assuming that it is our ideal to secure a maximum amount of progress from each individual of the class in a given time for preparation and recitation, and assuming further that a reasonable appeal to the spirit of competition in children is desirable, the following plans for note-book work are offered as having been thoroughly tried out in our classes, and as contributing materially to the end desired.

PLAN NO. I

Conditions Existing. Two classes in French, a first-year and a second-year high-school class, using respectively Chardenal's *Complete French Course* and Fraser and Squair's *Shorter French Course* as grammar texts, and Bierman and Frank's *Conversational*

¹Miss Jean Hadden conducted part of the experiment herein described for French, and many valuable ideas were borrowed from the excellent class room procedure of Mrs. Frances K. Burr, in German, and were made use of in both plans.

French Reader and Halévy's *L'Abbé Constantin* as reading material. Sizes respectively, 12 and 15 pupils.

General Method Pursued. After several weeks of preliminary work, pronunciation drill in the one case and grammar review in the other, the classes were requested to secure note-books of uniform size and shape. Definite days were assigned for grammar and reading. Definite instructions were given as to the manner of approaching a grammar lesson. The French sentences were to be studied and translated, with such reference to vocabulary and grammar rules as was necessary. Then the vocabulary was to be thoroughly studied, and last of all, the grammar rules were to be mastered. This was the point at which the retranslation of the English sentences was to begin. Each pupil had a standing assignment of the exercise next following the one he had finished, so that as soon as the class began to scatter, the necessity of the teacher's making individual assignments was done away with.

The note-books were kept in the school by the teacher. Each grammar day the pupil came with an exercise, or as much of one as he could do in the time allotted to preparation, worked out on scratch paper. This was copied into his book during the class hour, at which time he had an opportunity to ask the teacher any questions necessary and to make any revision that he himself found advisable in going over the work a second time. Ordinarily the questions were answered by reference to the needed paragraph of the text, so that the pupil was encouraged to use his book effectively and intelligently. When the pupils began to get exercises finished in their note-books, they came one at a time to the teacher's desk, where the exercise was gone over rapidly, mistakes under-scored, and the pupil sent back to his seat to make corrections in complete sentences on the opposite page, which was left blank for the purpose. In this way practically all the books could be handled within the hour. Those left over the teacher could easily do before the next grammar day, without feeling it a burden, but the work was so planned that no pupil escaped entirely for any considerable length of time the personal interview with the teacher. On the next grammar day the same process was gone through with, except that all corrections had to be made before any new exercises were copied into the note-books. This was rigorously adhered to.

When some weak pupils began to lag behind, a minimum requirement was set, and on a given day the lessons to that point were reviewed and a short quiz given. This practice regularly continued served both as a spur for the laggards and as an excellent review for those far ahead. On the reading days a large amount of oral practice was engaged in, and frequently ten minutes of the grammar day was used for oral work, if it was felt desirable. The possibility of such a combination is quite evident.

Discussion of Details of the Plan. The immediate result was a much higher grade of work than was secured under the old oral recitation of grammar and the too infrequent written work. The heavy burden of outside correction was largely removed from the teacher's shoulders, for this work was done for the most part in class. The pupils were encouraged to depend upon their books and their own efforts, yet help was available when needed. Thus the time of the bright was not wasted with explanations needed only by the dull. Every pupil was held for every grammar fact, and there was no escape or evasion. Every pupil was hard at work every minute of the class hour. If too slow progress was being made in the grammar, more days could be assigned to it, and *vice versa*. There was great incentive to correctness the first time through an exercise, for then there was less correcting and consequently more rapid progress. The working out of the exercises in rough form and then copying them into the note-books contributed greatly to this accuracy. Almost in no other way can one get a whole class to work through an exercise twice, revising and improving it.

The oral work was not allowed to suffer. The accomplishments of both classes in this regard were quite as satisfactory as those of other classes trained by a different method. In addition to the oral work on days devoted to reading, those especially needing pronunciation drill were given additional practice by occasionally having them read their sentences aloud at the desk. This was not found to disturb the other members of the class.

The problem of dishonesty was practically eliminated, for under the natural working out of this plan many exercises were studied and written in the class, if the pupil had reached that stage of his work. That is, if the old exercise was corrected and the new exercise copied into the note-book, the pupil did not stop, but

continued with the following exercise till the teacher reached him in his turn. Under the competition developed, seven pupils were racing for first place in one of the classes operating under this plan, while in the other enormous gaps developed. It was found that an occasional bright pupil with initiative and ambition could do two years' work in one, and such were encouraged to do so. This shows clearly the contribution made to the individual need of the pupil.

The making up of work missed was rendered a comparatively simple matter. The pupil simply continued as fast as he could from the point reached before the absence or other cause of delinquency.. This also relieved the teacher from the burden of responsibility in such cases. There was no misunderstanding of assignments, once the system was clearly in mind. The pupils liked it because there was always a definite task to do. It was easy to check up the pupils who failed to make preparation and call them to account for it. The teacher, of course, had to develop speed in checking the books, and could not linger long over individual mistakes. It was found to be a good plan to have two or three pupils in succession read the English sentences of a new exercise aloud as the teacher checked mistakes, until the material became sufficiently familiar to make consultation of the English unnecessary. The pupils' corrections, of course, had to be checked over. It was our custom to give a grade for the original exercise and to put a check mark at the top of each corrected page to show we had looked it over. This work can be done very rapidly as the teacher gains experience. A record of the work completed was kept by the teacher on a sheet of graph paper, the exercise being checked off for each pupil as he completed it.

We were frequently asked, "But what will you do when the end of the year comes? How will you take care of the inequalities?" That was quite simple. In the first-year class a limit was set in the grammar, determined by the average rate of the class. When the most advanced had reached this point, they were given extra reading of an easy grade, and an honor system of marks was introduced in such a manner that it was impossible for any pupil to get above a "Good" who had not done a considerable amount of such reading and reported on it for content. In the second-year class the limit was, of course, the completion of the grammar text, and

there, too, the solution was the same. The pupils were eager to get to the point where they could do this extra reading. Several second-year pupils read as much as six hundred pages extra, three hundred of which were reported on to the teacher. These were exceptional cases, however. The poorest read about forty pages.

As to the relation of this plan to the direct or reform method, it was as direct as the nature of the texts would allow. It must be borne in mind that only the note-book work has been described in detail here, with mere passing mention of the oral work in connection with the reading. The approach was always through the foreign language to the grammar. The percentage of French used in class, both oral and written, was very high, and we feel that we can defend the work against any criticism of being reactionary or too conservative. The plan is recommended both to teachers of French and of German, or of other foreign languages, for that matter, for adaptation to their particular needs. It will not work well in classes of more than fifteen or sixteen pupils, because of the volume of work turned out.¹ For larger classes and different text conditions we recommend:

PLAN NO. 2

Conditions Existing. A Freshman first-year high-school class in German, using Manfred's *Ein praktischer Anfang*. Size, 27 pupils.

General Method Pursued. In a convenient corner of the black-board double columns were ruled off, labeled respectively 'Verlangt' and 'Extra'. After a complete lesson in the grammar had been worked out orally and a new lesson was just started, there was inserted in the first column the paragraph number of one of the abundant exercises contained in the text, always one that was well adapted to written work, but in this case never a set of English sentences to be done into German. In the second column were inserted the numbers of two or three other exercises in the completed lesson, among which was usually the set of English sentences.

¹Before leaving the discussion of Plan No. 1, the possibilities of a reverse procedure to that described deserve to be pointed out. That is, instead of relying solely upon reviews for general class recitation in grammar, the material might be passed over very rapidly in advance, the teacher pointing out particular difficulties, and the pupils being allowed to follow up this general presentation as rapidly as they could. For an especially weak class this would have certain advantages.

The note-books were distributed by a pupil appointed for the purpose, and this was regularly attended to before the bell rang. It was thoroughly understood by all pupils that the first ten minutes of the hour were to be spent in writing, and work on the paragraphs indicated was begun without delay and without special direction from the teacher. At the end of the appointed time the note-books were passed in and stacked in a convenient place to wait for the next day's written work.

It will readily be seen that while some pupils did only the required minimum, others would do a large part or all of the extra exercises as well, thus getting an extra amount of practice. The teacher went about the class during the writing and called attention to flagrant errors. The work, as in Plan No. 1, was written on one page and the opposite page left blank for corrections. The teacher checked the books outside of class at his leisure, five books now, now ten, or the whole lot, as he saw fit. It was a standing rule that all mistakes indicated were to be corrected before advance work was to be taken up, and the same system of grades and check marks was used as under Plan No. 1.

Discussion of Details of the Plan. The most important result was undoubtedly that the abler pupils in the class were given a chance to develop their powers to the full during this written work, and were in no way hampered by the slowness of the weaker ones. Two or three bright and rapid workers were able frequently to finish even the extra exercises assigned within the time allowed, and these were then given some easy reading text which was always to be found on the teacher's desk, and which they were privileged to get when the written work was completed. This proved a great stimulus to rapid and careful work, for the privilege of doing this extra reading was highly prized as a special mark of honor.

The checking did not prove a burden, for it could be done at odd times; there was no necessity for doing all the books at once, as the work was proceeding on an individual instead of a uniform basis. Improvement was steady, for instead of doing a large amount of writing infrequently, some was done every day. Often a dictation exercise or writing a poem from memory was sandwiched into the writing period, perhaps taking up an extra five or ten minutes of the class hour. All of the extra written work, as well as all tests and examinations given the class, went into this one

note-book, and all were corrected in the same way. There was no need for loose sheets of paper to be flying about or cluttering up floor or desks.

Here, even better than in Plan No. 1, the problem of dishonest written work took care of itself. The work was all done in class under the teacher's eye. Pupils inclined to want help frequently were referred to their texts, if necessary by page or paragraph, until they formed the habit of depending on their own ability to find what they wanted. This, as was indicated above, is an exceedingly important matter; one of the most serious faults of our teaching is that our pupils do not learn to use without special direction the printed helps they have. A language pupil's grammar should, as he progresses, become his trusted and well-known companion, instead of being allowed to collect dust in some forgotten corner, as too frequently happens.

The condition of the classes trained by these two plans is, at the beginning of the present school year, so satisfactory, that we feel amply repaid for our experiments, and justified in our confidence in the initiative of American youth if it is given proper encouragement and an end to work for.

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